



24 March 2020

Dear ICA community,

Thank you for your questions this past week about how the #ica20 conference will progress as the COVID-19 pandemic continues to evolve.

As you know, the Executive Committee of the Board of Directors made a decision on 6 March to convert the 70th Annual ICA Conference to a virtual format. It has become apparent since then that this was the only appropriate choice. For some of you, the move to virtual came as a relief; for others, you may be experiencing stress at the thought of adding conference preparation on top of your already evolving duties as you scramble to move all of your instruction online, or as travel related to research projects is suspended indefinitely.

We realize that the situation between now and the conference at the end of May is unpredictable. What is clear is that our membership is facing huge challenges. As the effects of COVID-19 move in waves across the globe, these challenges will not hit at the same time and they will look very different for different countries, and even different parts of countries. Unfortunately, some of our members will be affected directly by the virus, while others will have significant additional care duties. Many will be transitioning to new work routines, experiencing domestic challenges, and we will all, in different ways, be affected emotionally by the pandemic. Our leadership and our staff are dealing with these possibilities as well.

The unfolding situation makes it very hard to take long term decisions on the conference. At headquarters and in the planning group we continue to work on many aspects of the conference, ranging from testing the online platform and making guidelines for asynchronous presentations and Q&As, to determining how to handle interactive sessions, business meetings, board meetings, the presidential address and myriad other events you may be wondering about. We promise to provide detailed instructions in the next few weeks in every case.

What we can currently say is that the vast majority of presentations will be asynchronous, pre-recorded in a method that allows for narrated slides, and accompanied by a Q&A chat function that stays open the entire week so that you can converse with those in different time zones without having to be present at some narrowly defined time. Posters will be PDFs, into which you will embed your contact information. The virtual environment is robust – this is not just a series of Zoom meetings. That said, **no one will judge you if you give your presentation with a partner walking across the background, a small child on your hip, or in pyjamas. We will meet you where you are.**

In addition, we have worked hard on creating a **hardship fund** for our students and early career colleagues that find themselves in a difficult financial situation due to the COVID-19 pandemic, stuck with non-refundable airfares or visa expenses they cannot use. We thank the institutions that have stepped up and donated during a very tumultuous time, our own divisions and interest groups that have put their travel budgets and more into the fund (some donating their entire annual budgets), the individual donations, and the many that have donated their 25% conference refund. It has been truly moving to see the level of support. We will soon announce the procedure to make use of this fund.



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**Today, our main message is the following: the conference will go forward in a virtual format. Whether you participate on a robust way, in a bare minimum way, or not at all is up to you** and we will of course be understanding of those who simply do not have the bandwidth to record a presentation or participate in a Q&A as the conference time nears. **We caution everyone to not make this decision right now.** By May, many of us may be worse off than we are now, but many of us may be settled into a routine and eager for some human interaction and intellectual discourse. **We have members in 87 different countries, so there is no "one-size-fits-all" solution here. ICA is a truly global community.**

To address this, we will of course be as lenient and accommodating as we can. Some will maybe not have the option or capacity to join after all by May, others may not be able to work on presentations or engage in online Q&A. Others will find it a welcome opportunity to put their mind on work for a bit and receive and offer feedback. We will be in different situations and deal with this differently. And that is fine! **The past weeks have shown that we are a strong community. We will be so, also, when we meet online.**

None of us can predict the future, but we are hopeful. For now, we believe #ica20 can offer a chance to come together, reflect on research, and help younger colleagues who are in programs or job hunting and need our input and comments. We will all gain a first experience of what large-scale online conferencing entails, and its drawbacks and advantages, and offer a venue to exchange notes on crisis related research.

For now, we wish you all well!

Stay safe.

Claes de Vreese  
ICA President Elect  
2020 Program Planner

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